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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001441

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SUBJECT: CABINET FORMATION AND PM OFFICE UPDATE

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR MICHAEL J. ADLER FOR REASONS
1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. In an April 30 meeting with PolOffs, Shia Coalition independent Sami al-Askari reported that PM-designate Nuri Kamil al-Maliki has named Ahmad al-Saadawi as his private office director. Al-Maliki's inner circle is moving forward with re-organization and expansion plans for the PM's Office. Shia Independent Qassim Daoud told poloffs that seven key ministerial positions should be exempt from the UIC-proposed point selection system. Tawafuq ministerial selection negotiator Ali Baban said that Tawafuq, Hewar and Iraqiya had failed to reach agreement on how to fill the "Sunni" deputy prime minister (DPM) position. Baban said that Tawafuq had refused a UIC proposal that the Sunni bloc get the MFA in exchange for the MOD. End Summary.

MALIKI ADVISER ON GOVERNMENT AND PM OFFICE TRANSITION

¶2. (C) In an April 30 meeting with PolOffs, Maliki adviser Sami al-Askari expressed confidence that the GOI can form a new government by May 10. However, he would not confirm whether or not the blocs have agreed to exempt any of the sovereign ministries from the point selection system. Al-Askari said the three positions in the PM Office configuration who will answer directly to the PM are the Private Office Director, Senior Policy Advisor and Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers. Al-Askari

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said that al-Maliki has chosen Ahmad al-Sadawi to be his new Private Office Director. (NOTE: Ahmed al-Sadawi is an Iraqi Canadian who returned to Iraq in 2003. According to al-Askari, al-Sadawi has vast management experience and speaks excellent English. Others have suggested, however, that al-Sadawi has a far less extensive management background. We understand that this appointment has been made on a four-month trial basis.) Al-Askari intimated to PolFSN that he expects to be named Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers. Al-Askari claimed the PM-designate's team was reviewing resumes for senior policy advisors from all political blocs. He asserted that the policy advisors in the PM office would not have executive power over any ministry. PolOff cautioned that the policy advisor-ministry relationship will need to be clearly defined. (NOTE: PolOff also heard on May 1 that Salam Abd al-Razzaq was named the PM-designates temporary spokesperson. END NOTE) Regarding the PM's security plan, Al-Askari said the U.S. should work to dissolve the Kurdish Peshmerga and Tariq al-Hashimi's "private militia" (sic). He made no mention, however, of the Sadrist Jaysh al-Mahdi.

DAOUD: NURI BETTER LISTENER THAN JAFARI

13. (C) In an April 30 meeting with PolOffs and VP Abd al-Mahdi advisors Fareed Yaseen and Zuhair Humadi, Shia independent Qassim Daoud asserted that the difference between PM Ibrahim Jafari and PM-designate Nuri al-Maliki is that Nuri is a good listener, has an open mind and would welcome USG suggestions for strategic posts and PM office organization to guarantee success. PolOff reiterated that the U.S. is interested in experienced, competent and honest candidates for government positions. Daoud urged the Embassy to be as direct as possible in expressing this view.

14. (C) Daoud proposed that seven key ministerial positions (Interior, Defense, Oil, Finance, Electricity, Transportation, and Health) be exempt from the UIC-proposed point selection system and instead have the selection based on competence and relevant experience. Daoud claimed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is not important to the Shia Coalition; the UIC is willing to let the Sunnis and Kurds fight over the Foreign Minister position. In contrast, he argued that the Ministry of Oil is extremely important and insisted that Fadhila should not be granted control. Daoud said there is no contest between prospective MoO candidates Thamer Ghadban and Hussein al-Shahrastani. He argued that both men are honest, but claimed that former nuclear physicist Shahrastani cannot compete with Ghadban's 30 years in the oil business. Fareed Yasseen added that quick decisions are needed in the oil sector and it would take Shahrastani too long to ramp up no matter how intelligent he is.

15. (C) Daoud said that al-Maliki considers the security situation his top priority. Daoud commented that al-Maliki's recent press statement on militia disbandment, supported by Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani's statement, was a good sign. However, he warned that the relationship between Muqtada

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al-Sadr and al-Maliki remains "unknown." Daoud said that the question of disbanding the Jaysh al-Mahdi militia could become a sore point in the Da'wa-Sadrism alliance.

No Deputy PM resolution between Sunnis and Iraqqiya

16. (C) Tawafuq's ministerial selection committee leader Ali Baban told PolOff April 30 that a meeting earlier in the day with Iraqqiya and Hewar representatives failed to reach agreement on the question of how to fill the "Sunni" deputy prime minister (DPM) position. Baban maintained there had been agreement between these parties in late March that Tawafuq would get the DPM position. But he said that agreement had now fallen apart. Baban said the April 30 meeting ended with no resolution in sight, but he added the three parties would continue negotiations. Baban said Tawafuq's top nominee for DPM would be Rafe'a al-Isawi, a Fallujan and head of the Ministry of Health's Fallujah office. Baban said Tawafuq's second choice for DPM would be Dr. Salam Zaygam. A member of Adnan Dulaymi's party, Zaygam has a Ph.D. in agriculture and is a university professor. Baban said that all parties -- not just Tawafuq -- should work together to make room for positions for Hewar's Saleh Mutlaq and Iraqqiya's Ayad Allawi.

MOD Tawafuq's Top Priority

17. (C) Baban ranked Tawafuq's ministerial wish list, in descending order: Defense, Finance, Planning, Education, Human Rights, and Youth and Sports. He said Tawafuq has just begun to discuss specific candidates internally and had yet to provide the Shia Coalition with names. He explained that until Tawafuq members can agree among themselves, and then with Hewar and Iraqqiya, there would be no such meeting.

Baban said that Tawafuq refused the Shia Coalition's offer of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in exchange for the Ministry of Defense. (NOTE: In his April 30 meeting with poloffs, al-Askari asked for USG help in securing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Sunni Arabs, claiming that an MFA under continued Kurdish leadership could not be as successful as a Sunni-led ministry in "opening doors" to Iraq's neighboring countries.)

18. (C) Baban said that Tawafuq does not want to fill the Minister of Interior (MOI) position because it will be "impossible" to rid the MOI of corruption. Baban added that Tawafuq will press the Shia to nominate a truly independent person to clean up the MOI. As a back-up, Tawafuq's MOI candidate would be Tawfiq al-Yasiri. Baban discounted Qassam Daoud as too sectarian for the MOI position. Baban said he would like to be Minister of State for Security Affairs or Minister of Planning. (BIONOTE: Ali Baban lived in Iraq until 1977. He then lived in Jordan, Yemen, Egypt, and the UAE, where he was a university professor in statistics and finance. END NOTE)
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